1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

CHAPTER TWO

THE HOMES OF THE LEPCHAS

i

133 Zongu is a roughly triangular portion of very mountainous land, approximately forty miles on each side, bounded on the south-east by the river Teesta, on the north-east by the river Talung and on the third side by the mountains south of Kinchenjunga. The land is excessively precipitous; the rivers are at about 2,000 feet above sea-level and the average height of the hills is about 12,000 feet; but the peaks rise to more than double that height, Kinchenjunga at the head of the Talung valley, which dominates the western horizon, being over 28,000 feet. Except for a few artificially levelled places there is probably not a hundred square yards of flat ground in the whole district; and the tracks are too steep and too uneven for it to be possible to employ mules, let alone horses; all travelling has to be done on foot, and all goods transported by human porterage.

361 The river valleys are hot, steamy and somewhat malarious, and consequently there are no houses right on the river, though the ground is used for raising subtropical plants; there are however occasional houses about 500 feet higher up. Most of the houses and cultivated land are between 3,500 feet and 7,500 feet above sea-level, a relatively narrow band above the two rivers, though occasionally fields are made at even higher altitudes. Above the cultivated land is the forest in which wild produce is gathered, a decreasing amount of hunting done, and to which the cattle are sent up to pasture in the winter months. Above the forest level comes first the rhododendron forest, and then the snows, rarely visited except by hunters searching either for ibex and musk-deer or for the wild aconite which forms the basis of their arrow poison.

132 The climate of the Talung valley is excessively wet, even for the Himalayas; it is only in the autumn months—from the end of September to the end of November—that there is no rain.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

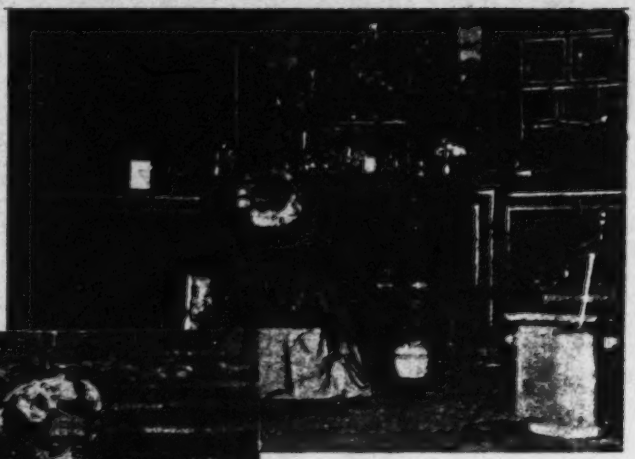
241 The big fields, which are cleared by burning once every eight years, where the main crops of dry rice, buckwheat and millet are raised, are mostly above the level of the houses; so that it is by no means unusual for people to have fields three or more miles away from their houses, and three thousand feet higher up or lower down the mountain side. Consequently field-houses are built for
241 those periods when there is heavy work to be done in the fields—
342 either weeding, or chasing away predatory birds and beasts from the ripening crops, or harvesting. In the permanent cultivations down in the valley these field-houses are solidly built structures, consisting only of a single room but otherwise in all respects similar to the ordinary Lepcha house. In some cases they are permanently inhabited by one or two members of a household either for reasons of health or because they do not agree too well with the other members. These field-houses however are built at any time without any ceremony for the selection of the site or at any time in the course of construction; and they are not included in the house-tax. The field-houses in the temporary cultivations are very flimsy affairs chiefly made out of matting.

481 The extremely precipitous nature of the ground renders travelling extremely difficult for Europeans who are accustomed to levelled paths and who walk shod. The Lepchas, owing to long habit, are magnificent walkers and climbers, and can cover enormous distances without apparent fatigue or breathlessness. I found the descent to the river which I made one day to witness the repairing of the bamboo bridge—a descent of about three thousand feet in a mile and a half—and the return therefrom, almost exhausting; the Lepchas will make the same journey without discomfort two or three times a day. Their physical strength and agility is amazing;
● [482] over paths, or rather tracks, where experienced mountaineers need to use both hands, the Lepchas will carry heavy loads on their backs. Indeed one day Chala Mandal, the head of the village, after he had been recounting semi-legendary, semi-historical stories of the past exploits of the Lepchas, said with a deprecating smile 'Nowadays all the Lepchas are good for is carrying loads.'

vi

776 Writers about Sikkim and Tibet who incidentally mention the Lepchas refer to them with surprising unanimity as 'animists'; and the references to devils' habitations in the desiderata for a house-

756



The Nunjimu attempting to induce a state of trance.

[778]

After the divination. Note the special woollen wreath worn by the Nunjimu; also the drum and bell which she is holding.

854
482

The sick child. This photograph also illustrates the normal method of carrying babies.

[Facing p. 124]

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

231 animals that in adjacent Tibet are universally employed for transport. Such loads as have to be transported are carried entirely by men. For this purpose they do not, however, [482] often use the head-strap, the commonest method throughout the Eastern Himalayas, but carry their loads by means of a strap round their shoulders. It usually takes the form of a length of creeper, torn from a tree at the time.

* * * * *

[793] Lamas may not take any form of life, and men should not 231 eat the flesh of animals killed by women; but apart from 857 this there are no restrictions in the slaughtering of domestic animals. There is no ceremony when a child kills its first animal. A boy generally starts to kill chickens when he is about ten; goats and pigs four or five years later. It is thought, however, that a youth should not attempt to slaughter oxen before he is about twenty, and not before he is capable of copulating with a woman. "If he is unable to copulate," said Karma, "he would not dare to kill an ox; he would not be nearly strong enough, and it might easily turn on him. If, however, he is able to copulate then he is strong enough to be able to look after himself." I should add, however, that this is merely a manner of speaking, and that there is no significant connection between the two acts.

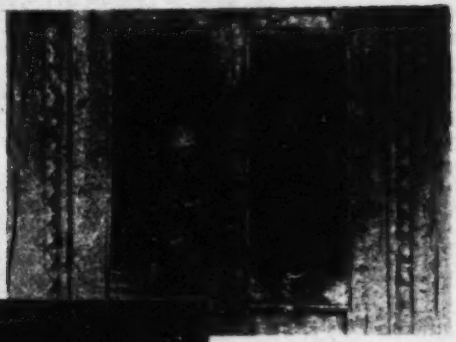
* * * * *

136 The dense forests of Jongu are well stocked with deer 224 (mostly the so-called Barking Deer—*Stylocerus ratna*) and pheasants, so that by means of hunting the people are able to vary and supplement their ordinary diet.

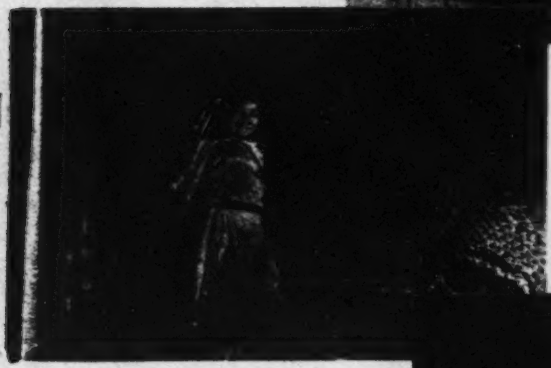
224 A boy usually starts to hunt at about the age of fifteen, 868 and for the first few times he will go out unarmed with some experienced man. Later on he will make or acquire a bow and arrows of his own; and if he cannot make them himself he will get someone else to give them to him. He will never, however, ask his own father for a bow and arrows, unless he too happens to be a hunter, because "hunting is merely

291
142
[531
341]

Happy family.



[285]



Lepcha girl.

[482
854]

Tafoor's two daughters.

[301
415]

Baby, having overeaten at luncheon.

[facing p.210]

231
351
●480
142
291

Mikma, in the centre, about to set off for his *Askyak*, or formal betrothal. The Mandal, his official "go-between," is on the right, and the other men are carrying the special betrothal gifts, among which, on the left, is a pig's carcass.

Mikma, a bridegroom of fourteen.

291
142

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

[FACING P. 226]

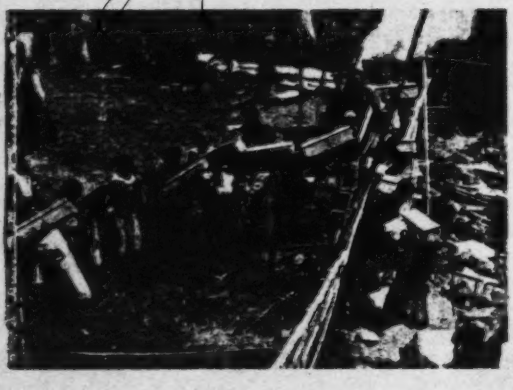
2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

796

The *Boom Kor* ceremony. The procession about to leave Lingtem monastery.

[341
415
855]

[779
482]



The sacred books starting off on their journey round the district. Each volume is carried by a woman.

[778]

Small image of Guru Rimpoche, over which a bell-shaped "umbrella" is held, and pot of holy water being carried in the procession.

[FACING p.290]

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5

291 dress is with sleeves) held with a girdle, and a jacket over it.
[177] The head gear consists of a cloth worn in the manner of the Nepalese women. The old head-dress for the men was a thimble-shaped hat woven from bamboo; see book-cover. (Fig. 33-36).

301 The Rong folk wear rings, bracelets, and necklaces as ornaments. But one will never come across a case of a Rong wearing any ornamentation to the nose, the feet and the toes.

412 The most common implement used by the women is the sickle. A bent sickle hook-shaped at the upper end is called bahur in the Lepcha tongue, and kurpa in Nepalese. It is used for cutting wood and the branches of trees. Another kind of sickle, in the shape of a half moon, is called angsu (sikāl in Nepalese) and is used to mow grass and weeds. The third type has a toothed edge, and is used as a kind of saw. It is called angsu in Lepcha and ancher in Nepalese. A girl is given her sickle
[268] at the age of seven or eight, and the boy his knife, so that from a very early age they may be able to practise the use of the most universal of instruments. Usually it is carried
●[482] in the belt at the back. (Fig. 37-44)

241 412 The most important of the implements used for farming is the wide shovel-like hoe, and it is used for loosening the earth and clearing it of weeds. There are in addition two or three pronged hoes used for loosening the earth and relieving it of weeds.

[177] The plough has been taken over from the Nepalese. It consists of a horn shaped piece of wood, which is tipped by the iron ploughshare. The drawing beam goes up from the centre and above is the plough handle with a handle to steer with. The beam is fixed to the yoke which is drawn by two oxen.

205 174 The economy of the Rong corresponds entirely with that of the other mountain peoples of South-East Asia and South China, *e.g.* the Miau. They were originally hunters who have taken over to farming. They have certainly not learnt the old agricultural economy from other peoples, but they absorbed into themselves the people who practised the arts of farming. Domestic animals are reared mainly for the purpose of sacrifice and not for any economic gain, and they are of the greatest importance. The combination of hunting with

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5

142
231
482
412
415
291
857

25. Lepcha children starting for field work

142
291
243
462

26. Lepcha women planting rice

Fig. 23-24 p. 99

[End Plate 9]

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5

291
482
445
412
137
313

37. Lepcha grandmother cutting bamboo

142
291
302
137

38. Lepcha children

[End Plate 15]

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5

291
482
415
854

41. Lepcha mother carrying her baby

854
142
291

42. The baby in the cradle

[End Plate 17]